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The Spirit of the Kunta Kinte Heritage Festival Rises Above Pandemic Woes



A dancer wows the crowd as a drummer beats the drum at Susan Campbell Park, during the 31st annual Kunta Kinte Heritage Festival in Annapolis, Md on September 25, 2021. This year marked a return of the festivities, despite the pandemic. (See article on page 10). Photo courtesy of Christian Smooth @Smoothhouseproductions

...3, 2, 1, Blastoff! PNC Bank Launches Project 257

Initiative Looks to Propel Women's Financial Equity

By Ursula V. Battle

A 2020 report showed that it would take until the year 2278 to close the economic gender gap. But PNC Bank doesn't feel that makes good business "cents," and the financial institution has taken steps to help change this anticipated timeline. PNC recently launched Project 257: Accelerating Women's Financial Equality, an initiative designed to help close the 257-year economic gender gap and expand on PNC's decades-long track record of supporting female financial decision makers.

"We call female financial decision makers a woman who owns a business or is managing her personal and family accounts from a wealth perspective," said Laura Gamble, Regional President for PNC Bank, Greater Maryland. "We've focused on women for quite some time, and there's plenty of statistics that show that women are in control of wealth, and the fastest growing segment of new business owners. So, there's a lot of good reasons why we have focused on women as customers."

"Project 257" was derived from the World Economic Forum's 2020 Global Gender Gap Report that found at the current pace of progress, it will take another 257 years for women to catch up to men from an economic perspective. The World Economic Forum is the International Organization for Public-Private Cooperation. Established in 1971, the Forum strives to demonstrate entrepreneurship in the global public interest while upholding standards of governance.

"We recently became aware of the World Economic Forum's 2020 Global Gender Gap Report that showed at the current pace, it would take women 257 years to reach economic parity," said Gamble. "With all the statistics of why we're interested, women as customers are still 257 years behind men in terms of reaching financial parity. The Report really made us stop and look at the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and



Laura Gamble, Regional President for PNC Bank, Greater Maryland

Courtesy Photo

ask, "What can we do? What can we do to take our work to the next level? We decided we needed to step it up."

PNC has partnered with SheEO, a global nonprofit whose mission addresses one of the major factors driving the 257-year gap: women's lack of access to capital. PNC Bank's three-year, \$1.257 million commitment is the largest contribution that SheEO has received from a U.S. company. SheEO provides interest-free loans to businesses, or "Ventures," owned and led by individuals who identify as women or nonbinary (someone who does not identify only as a man or woman) and crowdfunds capital from "Activators."

The "Activators" fund the loan pool and play an active role in evaluating and selecting the "Ventures." SheEO has funded over 100 innovators— 45 percent of whom are Black, Indigenous, and women of color, and touts a 95 percent payback rate on loans. The

organization has crowdfunded \$7 million to support more than 100 "Ventures" in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom.

"PNC Bank was looking for partners to help jumpstart women businesses, and we heard about SheEO," said Gamble. "We thought SheEO was a great fit. Not only because of the provision of zero interest loans to businesses, but they also provide support and advice and are helping women-owned businesses to grow. SheEO is also a very diverse

group of women, and that attracted us as well."

Through this partnership, PNC will work with SheEO to drive awareness and help increase the number of "Activators" who support SheEO Ventures. Fifty PNC employees who identify as women or nonbinary, will serve as Activators on behalf of PNC—one per market in which PNC has a presence—and play a significant role in the selection, mentorship, and success of SheEO Ventures.

"The Activators not only contribute money and vote on the Ventures, but they are also a community of support to these women-owned businesses," said Gamble. "So those who are selected not only receive zero interest loans, but can call on this community of Activators for help."

PNC's long-standing support of women can be seen across the organization, from Women's Business Development's executive Advisory Board to its nearly 4,000 PNC-certified women's business advocates, who are active in their communities and committed to providing valuable resources to female decision makers.

"Through Project 257, we want to close the equity gap, and it not take 257 more years for women to hit financial equality with men," said Gamble. "I would like to see Maryland be a wonderful place for women to do business, start a business, or to just work and thrive."

The application process for "Project 257," opened September 13, 2021 and concludes November 1, 2021. For more information or to apply for the program, visit: pnc.com/women.

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Guest Editorials/Commentary

The Biden administration deports thousands of Haitians

By Dr. Ken Morgan

Since the 1970s, Haitians have sought asylum at U.S. borders. Since the 1970s, the U.S. presidential administrations have rejected Haitian asylum claims. Plus, Uncle Sam has held our Haitian sisters and brothers longer in detention. At the beginning of the 1990s, over 12,000 Haitian refugees found themselves detained at Guantanamo for an indefinite period. The U.S. denied the vast majority denied asylum.

Now, 30 some years later, 14,000 migrants, most of them Haitians, who are seeking asylum and employment in the U.S. are being turned away.

They camped out in filthy conditions in the town of Del Rio, Texas. Mainly Haitians, a small number of Cubans, Venezuelans and Nicaraguans were in the mix. Del Rio, a town of 35,000 people surrounded by ranch lands, is 130 miles west of San Antonio. These refugees found themselves fenced in beneath a bridge over the Rio Grande that connects Del Rio with Ciudad Acuña, Mexico.

Many Haitians have exited Haiti over the last decade seeking work in Latin America. The numbers drastically declined during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their native country remains in a continuing worldwide economic and social crisis brought on by the U.S. Only a month ago, an earthquake killed, injured and devastated thousands of Haitians.

Years of political instability continue to rock this once proud country—the first to end slavery in the western world in 1804 through a successful slave revolt. The assassination of President Jovenel Moise in July this year is the latest episode.

Haitians numbering in the thousands remain at the U.S. border. The U.S. provided only an insufficient amount of needed clean water, food and portable toilets. When these U.S. deportation flights began, growing crowds of men, women, and children walked back through the Rio Grande to Mexico to avoid deportation to Haiti.

President Biden's administration has now increased its move to deport thousands back to Haiti. Flights began on September 19. The deportations are taking place before the Haitians possess any opportunity to apply for asylum. Former President Trump, through a COVID-19 executive order, first put in place this order. It continues to rob them of any right to seek asylum.

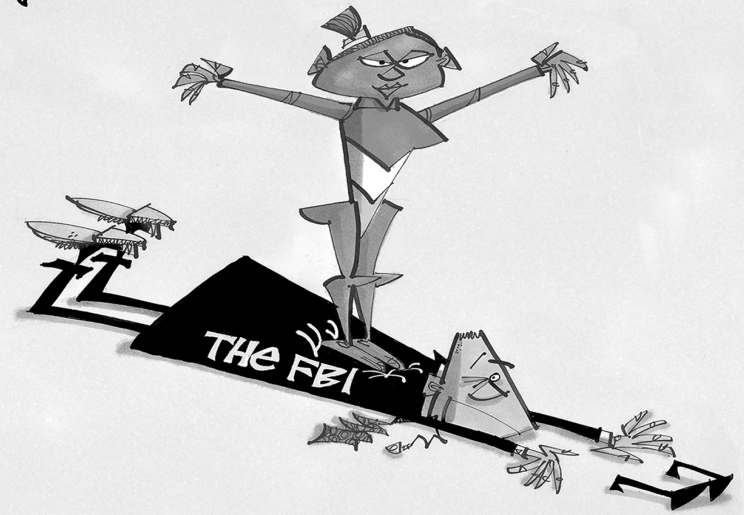
According to the United Nations, the 1951 Refugee Convention "recognizes the right of persons to seek asylum from persecution in other countries." The document specifies that countries maintain an obligation to provide reasonable measures to allow individuals to seek asylum.

Demand asylum for Haitians and join the growing chorus for a world without borders.

Dr. Morgan is a former Assistant Professor at Coppin State University, internationalist, and black rights, activist. Reach him at kmorgan2408@comcast.net.

SIMONE BILES STICKS THE LANDING:

Judge BRONX KING FEATURES



Community Affairs

Baltimore Humane Society Memorial Park holds 2nd Annual Pet Blessing Event

Baltimore— On Sunday, October 3, 2021, the Baltimore Humane Society will host its second-annual Pet Blessing event for the Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. Father Patrick M. Carrion from the Saint Bernadette Parish will be at the Baltimore Humane Society Memorial Park to perform in-person pet blessings for all household pets. The historic pet cemetery is located at 1601 Nicodemus Road, Reisterstown, MD.

The public is invited to attend with their pets. Father Patrick will also be blessing the ashes of pets that have passed for families who wish to bring them. The event will be held in-person and outdoors with all responsible

distancing guidelines observed. All pets are welcome but small pets, cats and any pet who might become overwhelmed must be in a comfortable and secure pet carrier.

Parking will be provided in our administrative parking lot and along the driveway bordering the memorial park.

Pet blessings will take place at the entrance to the historical memorial park. There will be signs. Some chairs will be provided for those who are in line. Saint Francis is the patron saint of animals and the environment. It is tradition in the Catholic Church to hold blessings for household pets on his feast day each October.

The event is free. Donations will be accepted. RSVPs are not required but are requested. All questions and RSVPs can be addressed to cemetery@bmorehumane.org.

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American Business Leaders Step Up to Fight Inequities in the South

*By Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis Jr.,
President and CEO, National
Newspaper Publishers Association*

Even as the pandemic has laid bare societal inequities that have been eroding the foundation of our democracy, political leaders in Washington and in state capitols are mired in a level of rancor and partisanship not seen since the ideological struggles over the Vietnam War. This toxic atmosphere has left them incapable of addressing pressing, yet ingrained issues like the racial wealth gap, the digital divide, and vast inequalities in everything from health care to home ownership.

With COVID-19 still an omnipresent concern and the country's recovery still very much in jeopardy, individuals, families, and communities—particularly communities of color throughout the South—are struggling to deal with issues that have only been exacerbated by the pandemic.

From impediments to wealth creation opportunities and a dearth of education

and workforce development to a lack of access to reliable broadband, substandard housing, and inadequate political representation, communities of color have suffered an outsized toll during the ongoing public health crisis.

Yet political leaders can't even agree on basic facts that would allow the nation to implement a coherent national strategy for combatting a pandemic that appears to be entering a new wave amid the rise of the highly contagious Delta variant that is currently ravaging parts of the South.

Against that disillusioning backdrop, there is at least some reason for hope. Moving to fill the vacuum created by the inaction of our political class, a group of business leaders in the technology and investment sectors have embarked on a far-reaching—and perhaps unprecedented—campaign to address the social inequities and systemic racism that has historically plagued our country's southern communities.

Known as the Southern Communities Initiative (SCI), the campaign was founded by financial technology company PayPal, the investment firm Vista Equity Partners (Vista), and the Boston Consulting Group (BCG).

SCI was formed to work with local elected officials and advocacy groups to tackle the ubiquitous problems of structural racism and inequalities facing communities of color in six communities throughout the South. SCI notes that these areas—Atlanta, Birmingham, Charlotte, Houston, Memphis, and New Orleans—were chosen in part because they are home to around 50 percent of the country's Black population and are where some of the greatest disparities exist.

SCI is aiming to drive long-term change, as outlined by PayPal CEO Dan Schulman, Vista CEO Robert F.

Smith and BCG CEO Rich Lesser. In Atlanta, for example, SCI is working to bridge the wealth gap that exists among the region's African American residents. While there is a strong Black business community in the city, and high levels of Black educational achievement thanks to the regional presence of several Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and the voice of the Black Press, there is still an extremely low level of Black entrepreneurship and business ownership with only six percent of employer firms being Black-owned.

To remedy this disparity, SCI is working with the Southern Economic Advancement Project to create entrepreneurship hubs and accelerator programs to increase the number of minority-owned businesses. The corporations behind SCI are also using their networks to help other companies work with minority-owned supply companies.

In Alabama, SCI is seeking to bridge the massive digital divide in an urban area where 450,000 households are without connection to the Internet. In order to tackle the crisis, SCI is leveraging relationships with local schools and libraries to distribute laptops and service vouchers. Another tact SCI is taking is to partner with the owners of multi-unit buildings in low-income neighborhoods to install free public Wi-Fi for residents.

The lack of access to capital is another reason Black communities throughout the South have been traditionally underbanked. In Memphis, where 47 percent of Black households are underbanked, SCI is partnering with Grameen America to cover the \$2 million per year per branch start-up cost to build brick-and-mortar banks in minority communities. This alone will

provide 20,000 women access to more than \$250 million per year in financing.

Beyond these initiatives, SCI is partnering with groups like the Greater Houston Partnership and the Urban League of Louisiana to provide in-kind support to improve job outcomes for minority college students, expand access to home financing through partnerships with community development financial institutions, and harness the power of technology to expand health care access in underserved urban and rural neighborhoods.

The issues facing these communities throughout the South are not new nor will they be fixed overnight. Fortunately, SCI is taking a long-term approach that is focused on getting to the root of structural racism in the United States and creating a more just and equitable country for every American.

A once-in-a-century pandemic and a social justice movement not seen since the 1960s were not enough to break the malaise and rancorous partisanship in Washington. Fortunately, corporate leaders are stepping up and partnering with local advocates and non-profit groups to fix the problem of systemic injustice in the U.S.

We, therefore, salute and welcome the transformative commitments of the Southern Communities Initiative (SCI). There is no time to delay, because as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. so accurately said, "The time is always right to do what is right."

Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis Jr. is President and CEO of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA) and Executive Producer and host of The Chavis Chronicles on PBS TV stations throughout the United States. He can be reached at dr.bchavis@nnpa.org.

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Nonprofit 'Always Reading' gets books in the hands of underserved students

By Stacy M. Brown

Ramona Johnson, CEO, and founder of Always Reading, has more than 30 years of experience in housing and community development.

She has spent most of that time focused on underserved populations and minority groups.

In July 2004, Johnson was appointed by the Governor of Maryland to serve a five-year term on the Baltimore County Board of Education. In 2009, she received an appointment for a second five-year term but it's Johnson's devotion to helping children that resonates.

She founded Always Reading, a nonprofit whose mission is to empower children with abundant knowledge through books. She noted that the organization has great concern with what children read, mainly when the topic is American history.

"In particular," Johnson asserted, "how Black history is and isn't incorporated into the American story."

At Always Reading, officials provide free books that expose children of color to many untold stories and books that haven't received any exposure.

"We highlight that African Americans are often overlooked. Famous people and others like Shirley Chisholm, Jesse Owens, and others," Johnson said. "We search deep for these books, and we provide them all free."

The overall goal of Always Reading is to provide children in Title I schools with a variety of fiction and nonfiction books that portray a positive reflection of themselves and expose them to the rich history of African Americans, Johnson said.

Through generous donations from



(Top left) Ramona Johnson, CEO, and founder of Always Reading. (Top right) Calandra Arrington, vice principal (left) and Nichelle Walker, principal (right) of Morrell Park Elementary Middle School in Baltimore City, an Always Reading partner school. The overall goal of Always Reading is to provide children in Title I schools with a variety of fiction and nonfiction books that portray a positive reflection of themselves and expose them to the rich history of African Americans. (Right) An example of what a stack of 80 books looks like. Courtesy Photos

other nonprofits and partners of Always Reading, the books are provided free of charge, and they are new.

"The books have never been touched, and there are no highlights or markers," Johnson insisted. "You know the history of us. We typically have been given hand-me-downs, but these books are all new."

Johnson noted that studies have revealed that children growing up in a home containing at least 80 books creates enormous benefits, such as building vocabulary, increasing comprehension, and better educational outcomes.

She said Always Reading envisions

that each child, especially African Americans and other children of color have an abundance of diverse books in the home.

"It should come as no surprise that children from low-income households have fewer books in the home and frequently fewer books in the school," Johnson said. "Our goal is to get as many free books that expose and empower our children to a world that they may not otherwise know or understand."

"Get them into the hands of children who need books the most."

To find more and how to donate, visit: www.AlwaysReading.org.



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Black Professionals Month seeks to strengthen community of African American business leaders, entrepreneurs

By Stacy M. Brown

Despite gains in education and employment opportunities since the civil rights era, Black professionals show a significant underrepresentation in leadership advancement and wealth generation.

A Society for Human Resources Management survey recently revealed that Black professionals hold only 3.2 percent of all executive or senior leadership roles and less than one percent of Fortune 500 CEO positions.

Jerome Hutchinson Jr., and Denise Kaigler, two African American entrepreneurs hope to change the equation dramatically. They founded Black Professionals Month (BPM), a strategic initiative to ignite the change they say African Americans need.

“Since 2007, my companies have connected Black professionals to key relationships, information, and opportunities to enhance their career success,” said Hutchinson, chief servant officer and founder of ICABA World Network, the world’s leading online



Jerome Hutchinson, Jr., the chief servant officer and founder of ICABA World Network and Denise Kaigler, founder of MDK Brand Management and author. Hutchinson and Kaigler founded Black Professionals Month, a strategic initiative to ignite the change they say African Americans need. Courtesy Photo

community-enhancing success for Black professionals and entrepreneurs. “By recognizing and convening Black professionals annually, we hope to

enhance efforts to increase leadership roles and sustained wealth-building for Black professionals.”

An award-winning digital marketer, career coach and brand and communications strategist, Kaigler called her association with Black Professionals Month a no-brainer.

Kaigler, the founder of MDK Brand Management and author of “Forty Dollars and a Brand: How to Overcome Challenges, Defy the Odds and Live Your Awesomeness,” researched the troubling statistics and immersed herself into Black Professionals Month.

“I was seeing one particular statistic that showed that Black people occupy three-to-five-percent of all senior and executive-level roles,” Kaigler said. “All of the talk, energy, and investments made in diversity, equity, and inclusion programs in corporate America is having little impact. The gap hasn’t closed at all in the past five-to-10-years, so something must be done. Black Professionals Month is an opportunity to help Black Americans increase our presence around the world.”

Beginning Friday, October 1, 2021, an unprecedented 31 days of virtual programs and events kicks off to help ignite the leadership advancement of Black professionals. Hutchinson and

Kaigler have dedicated the month to building solid collaborations, proportionate leadership, and sustained wealth for Black professionals globally. Established Black professionals will offer inspirational words of wisdom during the in-person and live-streamed opening keynote address in Miami, Florida.

Throughout the month, attendees can participate in interactive BPM “mainstream” to “top tier” career advancement workshops that focus on personal branding, leadership development, and career pathways. Discussions will center on issues affecting Black professionals in the workplace, and organizers plan to help honor diversity leaders during the Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Conference and Awards.

Hutchinson and Kaigler say attendees will be able to network with company leaders during BPM “Industry Spotlights” to learn about and explore potential career opportunities across select industries. They also can attend subject-matter expert events to “deepen the understanding of critical areas that can impact the growth and advancement of Black professionals.”

“As a Black woman and former C-suite executive, I am deeply passionate about developing programs that can help Black professionals overcome challenges and reach their career goals,” Kaigler insisted.

Over the past 12 years, Hutchinson noted that he has built a network of more than 13,000 Black professionals and entrepreneurs.

“We are looking to be that one-stop-shop, if you will, for Black professionals who want to connect, collaborate, and build a trusted community,” Hutchinson said. “We didn’t want this as a one-off. We wanted something sustaining. I shared my ideas with [Kaigler], and this is not going to stop. It’s really a movement.”

The cost to register to attend Black Professionals Month ranges from \$49 for a day pass to \$99 for the leader package. An executive package that includes an entire month of access to programs and events costs \$199.

To learn more about BPM programs, to attend or to become a sponsor, visit: www.BlackProfessionalsMonth.com.



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12 Women to be Honored During 26th Annual Fannie Lou Hamer Awards Reception for Their Leadership In Civil and Human Rights

Annapolis— Chosen from across Anne Arundel County, 12 trailblazing women will be honored during the 26th Annual Fannie Lou Hamer Awards Reception, held from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. on Sunday, October 3, 2021 at the historic Banneker-Douglass Museum in Annapolis, Maryland.

Known for impacting their community— whether through social justice or advocacy— each woman has made a lasting mark on Anne Arundel County. This year’s honorees— Nas I. Afi; Delegate J. Sandy Bartlett; Sarah Margaret Blaser; Chanel Compton; Debora A. Darden; Gloria Dent; Sonia Feldman; Debi Jasen; Monica Lindsey; Roxanne McGowan; Rev. Marguerite R. Morris; and Darlene Washington— join the ranks of more than 100 notable women, including former U.S. Senator Barbara Mikulski, Administrative Law Judge Tracey Warren Parker; and former Annapolis Mayor Ellen Moyer; who were nominated in years past.

Fannie Lou Hamer, 1917-1977, was an American voting rights activist, civil rights leader, and philanthropist. The awards that bear her name recognize women from various racial backgrounds who, while not necessarily household names, have excelled in their chosen field while working diligently to improve civil and human rights in the region. In the spirit of Hamer, honoree Sonia Feldman works tirelessly to educate voters on matters of social justice through the political organization she founded, Action Annapolis. Honoree Sarah Margaret Blaser is recognized for her work in South County for South County Is Kind, which responds to local incidents of racism, as well as her efforts to organize the Maryland Black Lives Matter March. Honoree Chanel Compton is the CEO of Banneker-Douglass Museum, where she focuses on educating the Maryland community about African American history.

“These women exemplify the leadership Ms. Hamer brought to the Civil Rights movement,” said Carl



**Nas I. Afi,
Annapolis**

Coordinator for the NEA Affirmative Action UniServ Intern Program for Ethnic-Minorities and Women



**Delegate J. Sandy Bartlett,
Annapolis, Maryland House
of Delegates**



**Sarah Margaret Blaser
Shady Side
Founder of South County Is Kind**



**Chanel Compton
Baltimore**

Executive Director of the Banneker-Douglass Museum and the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture



**Debora A. Darden
Edgewood**

Warden of the Eastern Correctional Institution in Westover, Md



**Gloria Dent
Annapolis**

First National Director for Veterans Employment and Initiatives for the U.S. AbilityOne Commission

Snowden, chair of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Committee. “Their commitment to the Anne Arundel County community is humbling, and we thank them for their service. We are thrilled to take this evening to honor and celebrate this champion for economic and social

justice, and the women she inspired.”

Congressman Anthony Brown will offer welcoming remarks. A reception with heavy hors d’oeuvres will follow the program. The event is sponsored by the Martin Luther King Jr. Committee of Anne Arundel County. Tickets are sold

out, but viewers can watch the program on Facebook Live through the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Committee Facebook Page, or through www.mlkjrm.org. For more information, call 301.538.6353 or 410.419.2208 or e-mail arankin58@hotmail.com.



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for the Community Action Agency
(CAA) of Anne Arundel County*

A committee of community residents choose outstanding women each year from a list of nominees who live and/or work in Anne Arundel County. Anne Arundel is the only jurisdiction in the State of Maryland to celebrate Hamer's memory with awards of this nature.

"We are living right now in a world that is fighting for change on many levels, from social unrest in our cities, to expansive international crises," said former Sen. Mikulski, a 2009 Hamer honoree. "And while the news may seem grim, there is inspiration every day around the world as people come together to bring about peaceful change."

Fannie Lou Hamer was the youngest of 20 children born to Mississippi sharecropper parents. She was instrumental in organizing Mississippi Freedom Summer for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and later became the vice-chair of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, attending the 1964 Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, N.J., in that capacity.

Hamer's plainspoken manner and fervent belief in the Biblical righteousness of her cause gained her a reputation as an electrifying speaker.

She ran for Congress in 1964 and 1965, and was seated as a member of Mississippi's official delegation to the Democratic National Convention of 1968, where she was an outspoken critic of the Vietnam War.

Hamer worked on other projects, including grassroots-level Head Start programs, the Freedom Farm Cooperative in Sunflower County, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Poor People's Campaign.

Hamer died at the age of 57. Her tombstone is engraved with one of her famous quotes, "I am sick and tired of being sick and tired."

The Annapolis-based Martin Luther King Jr. Committee Inc., founded in 1988, hosts two major events each year: The first is the annual Fannie Lou Hamer Reception in October honoring woman of different racial backgrounds who have made contributions to the community. The second event is the annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Awards Dinner held in January to honor those local citizens whose leadership in civil rights has helped keep Dr. King's legacy alive. The proceeds from these events are being used to pay off the debt incurred by building the Civil Rights Foot Soldiers Memorial.



Rev. Marguerite R. Morris
Odenton
Founder of the Leah's House Shelter

The MLK Jr. Committee has successfully placed three memorials to the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. in Anne Arundel County funded by private donations. A bronze statue of King was erected at the Anne Arundel Community College in 2006 after the Committee raised more than \$250,000.



Darlene Washington
West River
*Executive Advisor
of the National Delicados*

In 2011, the Committee dedicated a plaque and garden tribute to Dr. King's wife, Coretta Scott King, at Sojourner Douglass College in Edgewater, Md. In 2013, the Committee erected a monument in Annapolis to the Civil Rights Foot Soldiers who marched in the famous 1963 "I have a dream" civil rights march on Washington.

The Spirit of the Kunta Kinte Heritage Festival Rises Above Pandemic Woes

By *Andrea Blackstone*

On a sun-filled September Saturday, Stewart Blake of Lothian sat alongside his sister while watching entertainers stir up the crowd, during the 31st annual Kunta Kinte Heritage Festival. Blake attended the festival for the third time as a part of a family tradition. During the 31st annual event, a friend joined the duo who came to celebrate the spirit of Kunta Kinte on September 25, 2021. They sat in a shady spot in portable chairs—with masks visible— while facing a stage in Susan Campbell Park located at the Annapolis City Dock.

Despite the festival's hiatus last year due to the pandemic, locals and individuals who hailed from near and far warmly embraced a new chance to socialize, celebrate African and Caribbean heritage, and pay homage to Kunta Kinte and the late author Alex Haley. Kinte was Haley's enslaved descendant who arrived in Annapolis on the Lord Ligonier in 1767.

This year marked a return of family and friends reuniting in the public space after COVID-19 created a wedge in a town which is known for being a cohesive community. It was also a homecoming of sorts. Haley's grandson—Bill Haley— had a first-time opportunity to attend the festivities with his cousins, Chris Haley and Alan Haley. Ousman Taal, Malick L. Manga, and Ambassador Ousman Sallah joined them as special guests.

"I guess it has been since I lived on the West Coast that I didn't attend the Kunta Kinte Heritage Festival over previous years, although I had been to Annapolis many times. I had not been there during the time the festival was happening," Bill said. "I'm so grateful that our family celebrated my grandfather with The Alex Haley Legacy Round Table Discussion the day before the festival. It covered behind the scenes recollections of his life and his journey in writing "Roots." The event brought me to Annapolis. Being physically present, the festival brought home in a personal way the impact of 'Roots' and its legacy in the city of Annapolis."

Except for Chris and Alan, the other three men also attended the event for the first time. They traveled from Washington state, Los Angeles, California and another part of Maryland. Taal is the grandson of Binta Kinte and Kebba Fofana who hailed from the village of Jufureh in The Gambia. Fofana told Alex the oral history of Kunta Kinte's family, when the late author was researching the origin of his African ancestor in 1967, according to Bill. Sallah served as the first Gambian ambassador to the U.S. and was a close friend to Alex Haley. Malick Manga was the son of that late Ebou Manga, who was the chief Gambian cultural advisor for both Roots miniseries which aired in the late seventies.

Amid walking history, the Kunta Kinte Heritage Festival's main stage was hosted by Terrell Freeman and comedian Chris Dillard. Acts like the "Clones of Funk" returned and inspired festival goers to let the weight of masks and hand sanitizer melt away as their melodic beats eased thoughts of stressful times. A fashion show, a genealogy talk, and other activities offered more opportunities to escape for the day.

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc.'s members provided community service information at a table.

"We've done a lot of Zoom events," Lacetta Bowman said, noting the Annapolis Alumnae Chapter's involvement during the pandemic. "As college educated-women, we stand out, and we're going to make a difference in the community."

Vendors like Dana Anderson—owner of Classic Desserts by Dana, LLC – met the needs of what festival goers might want to eat as sweet treats. It was the service-disabled veteran's first time participating as a food vendor during a special event. Anderson neatly presented chocolate chip cookies, snickerdoodle cookies, sliced cake and other goodies for sale through her Maryland Cottage Food Business which operates as a home-based bakery.

"The Kunta Kinte Heritage Festival was a great experience and it allowed me to get exposed to working side-by-side



*A vendor assists a customer at this year's Kunta Kinte Heritage Festival.
Photos: Andrea Blackstone*



Dana Anderson speaks to a customer while vending at an event for the first time.



Stewart Blake, left, enjoys a festive afternoon in Annapolis while watching entertainers with his sister and a friend.

with other vendors. It also allowed me the opportunity to network and get other opportunities to vend at other similar events. I truly enjoyed the experience, and it was a great day," Anderson said.

"It took me almost two months to plan, organize, bake, and get my marketing together for this event, but it was well worth it."

Sonja gives us **The Bizness®**

By **Donnie Manuel**

Whenever we hear the surname Norwood in the entertainment industry, we automatically think about R&B singer Brandy or her equally famous brother Ray J. However, the proverbial apples don't fall far from the tree—try saying that three times in a row without stuttering. What I mean by that is their mother Sonja Norwood is a star in her own right. In addition to managing the career of these two accredited performers, she is an entertainment talent manager and consultant who has worked with many other artists including Tameka 'Tiny' Harris; Silk; Ma\$e; and a host of other A-list artist and actors.

Sonja is the CEO of Norwood & Norwood Inc., an entertainment management organization, which has a history of accomplishments that span more than two decades. Originally from McComb, Mississippi, Sonja took her passion for philanthropy, dedication to family and faith...and excelled in a



Sonja Norwood
CEO of Norwood & Norwood Inc.
Courtesy Photo

world where all of the aforementioned qualities appear to be more of a hindrance rather than an asset. If you were to ask Sonja, where she got the drive to compete in a male-dominated industry, she would probably say as she

has been quoted as saying before... "It is only through access that greatness can be realized." And thus, one of her latest ventures—"The Bizness®."

The Bizness® offers online entertainment-centered workshops, webinars and training sessions. It was created by Sonja to help navigate the complex terrain of the entertainment industry based on her wealth of knowledge, experiences and phenomenal successes.

If you or anyone you know is interested in getting a leg up in the business of entertainment, I highly recommend this resource.

The Bizness® meets each Tuesday at 5 p.m. PST/8 p.m. EST. Download the Clubhouse app to receive access. Beginning Tuesday, October 5, 2021, from 5 p.m. to 8:30 pm, Sonja is offering the opportunity of a lifetime for any singers interested in being heard by

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Sonja says this project is close to her heart because she wants to give a special opportunity to individuals who otherwise might never have this chance.

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Built to Belong: Discovering the Power of Community Over Competition

Book birthed out of conversation about the pandemic

By Ursula V. Battle

Entrepreneur and author Natalie Franke recalled how she felt in April 2020 after COVID-19 changed the way people went about their daily lives.

“When the pandemic hit, I realized very quickly that we were not going to be able to gather in person anymore,” recalled Franke. “Especially in a large community of business owners. I felt there was no way we could do a good job of having some group meetings in person, and others virtual. I thought we would just have to go virtual.”

Franke would have a conversation with her sister-in-law that not only changed the way she felt— but the trajectory of her life.

“My sister-in-law and I were sitting on the back porch socially-distanced, and I said to her, ‘I don’t know how communities are going to survive if we can’t get together in person. What are we going to do? And my sister-in-law who has Cystic Fibrosis looked at me and said, ‘The Cystic Fibrosis community has never been able to be within six feet of one another. We can’t. If I get within six feet of another Cystic Fibrosis patient, we could swap bacteria and one of us could die. So, we’ve always had to build community from afar and always have had to lean on digital connection. Digital community can be transformative, and online connection can lead to what you’re looking for in person as well. These aren’t separate things Natalie. These things are integrated. These things, you know, can truly be innovation with digital communities and innovation without an invitation.’”

That conversation birthed Franke’s new book, *Built to Belong: Discovering the Power of Community Over Competition*. The work hones-in on the struggle of finding a sense of community in a world not only focused on competition, but a world glued to their phones.

“I began to lean into conversations, especially with members of the chronic illness community who can’t attend in person meetups, particularly during



Natalie Franke is the author of Built to Belong: Discovering the Power of Community Over Competition, which hones-in on the struggle of finding a sense of community in a world not only focused on competition, but a world glued to their phones. Franke is a nationally recognized entrepreneur, and co-founder of the Rising Tide Society, an alliance of over 70,000 small business owners.

Courtesy Photo

seasons where, influenza is at high rates,” said Franke. “And they’ve been doing this for years. They’ve cultivated online communities that are thriving, that are impacting people’s lives, and providing support and information education. There’s a whole chapter in the book specifically about really transforming our perspective on what community can look like and challenging us to start using social media platforms differently.

“Leveraging these platforms to move us away from comparison and scrolling and getting lost in content passively, and becoming active participants engaged in

connection and actually forging relationships online.”

In her new work, Franke gleams from her own life experiences including her diagnosis with a benign brain tumor, undergoing neurosurgery, fighting against infertility, and discovering that ‘community’ is more than a buzzword. “I’ve been an entrepreneur for over a decade,” said Franke who resides in Annapolis. “I’ve run a bunch of different small businesses. My first and primary being a full-time wedding photographer in the Baltimore area for eight years. I realized, at a critical moment in my life, that entrepreneurship and life don’t have

to be one giant competition. I discovered a lot of the societal values I was taught such as get the gold medal and win at all costs, along with the technological shifts pushing us towards a very digital world, had led me down a path of loneliness. It had created for me, a world in which I felt very isolated.

“I felt like life was a very competitive business. An era of dog-eat-dog world out there, where you don’t support anybody. I had built a six-figure salary, and everything was going great from a success perspective. But I was miserable. I realized that if I continued to follow the advice that I had been taught as to how to build my business, it was going to kill me.”

In her new work, Franke shares her story of longing for connection in a competitive world and tackles how to strike the balance between camaraderie and competition to live a fulfilled and joyful life.

“I realized there was also a narrative around fighting for others to succeed instead of just looking out for ourselves,” said Franke. “I thought, ‘what if we fight for our communities to win?’ That when we see another person rising higher or another woman achieving greatness, we stop looking at that as evidence that we’re falling behind. Instead, changing our mindset and seeing it as having fanned the flames of her success.”

The wife and mother is a nationally recognized entrepreneur, and co-founder of the Rising Tide Society, an alliance of over 70,000 small business owners.

“I am truly hoping everyone who reads this book starts to identify how to navigate competition, comparison, and jealousy in their life,” said Franke. “I want them to walk away from this book, knowing that they can fight for others to succeed and still experience success themselves. When we help others win, we all win.”

For more information or to order Franke’s book, visit: www.nataliefranke.com/book.

Ravens Justin Tucker possibly best kicker ever!

By Tyler Hamilton

“Simply the best.” That song by Tina Turner could very well become the theme music for Baltimore Ravens kicker Justin Tucker. His NFL-record setting 66-yard field goal that gave the Ravens a 19-17 win over the Detroit Lions last Sunday was the latest example.

“Justin Tucker, hey, he’s the best kicker in history. When you have a kicker like that, you want to give them an opportunity like that. For him to come through like that is just historic. Someone came up to me on the sideline and said, ‘I’ve never seen anything like that before,’” Ravens coach John Harbaugh said after the game.

With the game on the line and seconds left in the game, Tucker was unbothered as he lined up for the kick. That’s Tucker though. The pressure doesn’t seem to get to him. There’s never a moment that’s too big.

“I don’t want to build him up too much and get his head too big, but he does have kind of the perfect personality for the job. He likes the stage. He’s not afraid of it; he relishes it. You guys know; it’s his personality. It’s who he is, and I think that



Baltimore Ravens kicker Justin Tucker set an NFL record with a 66-yard field goal in the game against the Detroit Lions on Sunday, September 26, 2021.
Photo Credit: Kelvin Kuo/Associated Press

combination, with talent and good coaching, goes a long way,” Harbaugh said on Monday, September 27, 2021.

Needless to say, Tucker was named the AFC Special Teams Player of the Week on Wednesday for his performance. It’s the 12th time he has won the award.

Tucker joined the Ravens as an

undrafted free agent out of Texas in 2012. He helped the Ravens to their second Super Bowl victory as a rookie.

Tucker is a four-time first-team All-Pro and was named to the second team twice. He’s also been named to four Pro Bowls. When the NFL came out with its 2010 All-Decade team, Tucker was a

unanimous selection.

Throughout his 10-year career, no other kicker has been more accurate. His 90.7 field goal percentage is the highest in NFL history (minimum of 100 attempts).

It’s pretty clear why Ravens teammate Marlon Humphrey calls Tucker “Legatron.”

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How to prevent political discussions from polarizing your workplace

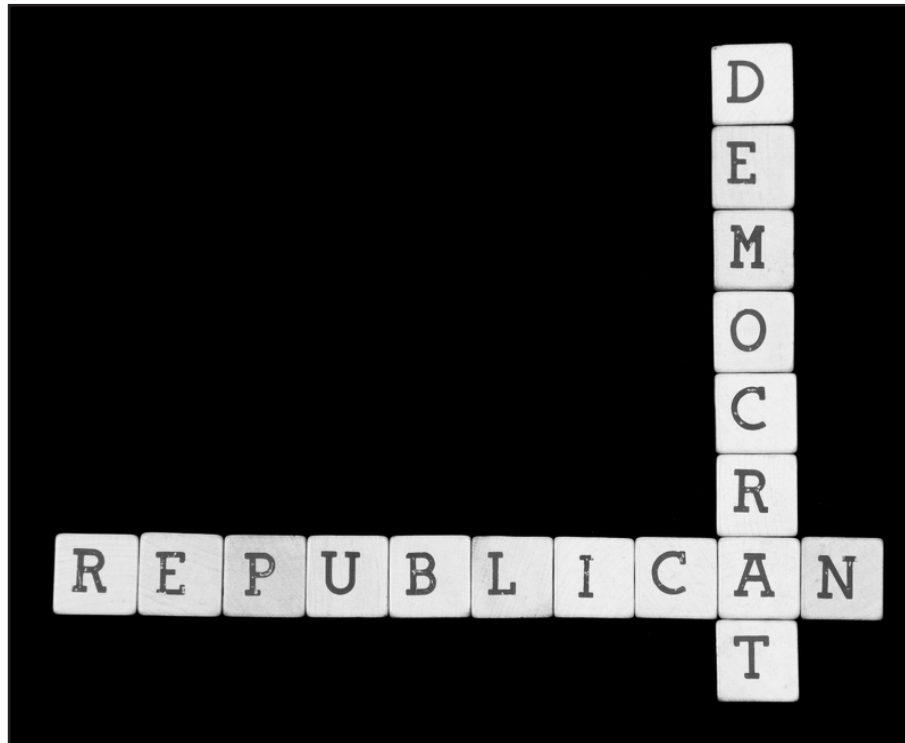
News & Experts— Much has been written about political polarization in the U.S. and how a heated political climate has drawn a line in the sand between voters.

But heading into the 2020 presidential election, self-censorship also is on the rise – including at the workplace, where some people fear sharing their political views. Nearly a third of employed Americans worry they could lose their jobs or be passed over for career advancements if their political opinions become known, according to a Cato Institute survey.

For business leaders trying to build a strong culture, knowing how to manage political expression and discussions in the workplace is critical, says Joel Patterson www.JoelPatterson.com, a workplace culture expert, founder of The Vested Group and ForbesBooks author of *The Big Commitment: Solving The Mysteries Of Your ERP Implementation*.

“Unfortunately, things have gotten so divisive that even if somebody just wears a shirt or makes an innocuous comment, somebody is going to get upset,” Patterson says. “When people at work are afraid to say anything political, that fearfulness isn’t conducive to a cohesive work environment. Rather than ignore it or futilely try to shutter it, business owners and managers are better off having a plan to deal with the political dynamic so it won’t disrupt their business and drive their employees apart.”

Patterson offers tips to help business leaders manage political discussions and



tensions, and keep politics in proper perspective, in the workplace:

Make company culture the first priority— Having an established set of company core values is highly beneficial in giving your team a framework for how they interact with peers, clients, and other professional contacts externally, Patterson says. “If you have a solid workplace culture, then core values like respect for others, including respect for others’ opinions, will carry the day and overcome political disagreements,” he says. “An emphasis on core values reminds everyone that they are all on the same team.”

Give flexibility – within reason—

“Most people don’t want or expect a formal workplace policy related to politics in the workplace,” Patterson says. “The leadership team of your business needs to let employees know they are valued as individuals while emphasizing that leaving politics out of the workplace is the best practice for all involved. Let your employees know you are flexible with their comfort level, but they are also accountable for how they conduct themselves as a representative of your company.”

Keep political programs off the office TVs— “You don’t want to invite arguments,” Patterson says. “Making sure that office TVs, especially in the break room, are not tuned to political programs is an easy preventive measure. Sometimes the news and panel discussions get people wound up.”

De-escalate, don’t instigate. As a manager or business owner, employees will be watching to see how you handle a heated political conversation between workers. “Try to cool things off and lead by example,” Patterson says. “If the employees persist, tell them that their loud conversation is distracting to a productive work environment. If someone you work with is expressing a viewpoint that doesn’t coincide with yours, a mental note to yourself to agree to disagree often does the trick.” “Handling political talk isn’t something business owners and managers should be afraid of,” Patterson says. “It’s an opportunity to ease the tension their employees feel and remind them that no matter their differences, they can remain strong together.”

Joel Patterson is the founder of The Vested Group, a business technology consulting firm in the Dallas, Texas area, and ForbesBooks author of The Big Commitment: Solving The Mysteries Of Your ERP Implementation. He has worked in the consulting field for over 20 years. For more information, visit: www.JoelPatterson.com.

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